What You Can Do: Goal Saboteurs and Simple Plans

• **It’s about execution**. Most of the time, we know what needs to be done to reach a goal—we just don’t manage to actually do it. Focusing on execution is essential for success.

• **Seize the moment**. Given how busy most of us are, and how many goals we are pursuing at once, it’s not surprising that we routinely miss opportunities to act on a goal because we simply fail to notice them. Achieving your goal means grabbing hold of these opportunities before they slip through your fingers.

• **Know what to do**. Once you’ve seized the moment, you’ve got to figure out exactly what you’re going to do with it. When you can’t act swiftly, you risk wasting the opportunity.

• **Put your shields up**. Goals require protection—distractions, temptations, and competing goals can steal your attention and your energy, and sap your motivation.

• **Know how you are doing**. Achieving a goal also requires careful monitoring. If you don’t know how well you are doing, you can’t adjust your behavior or your strategies accordingly. Check your progress frequently.

• **Make a plan**. Many of the problems we face when trying to reach a goal can be solved by creating simple if-then plans. Whether you’re trying to seize an opportunity, resist temptation, cope with anxiety and self-doubt, or persist when the going gets tough, these plans can help you do it.

• **Decide what you will do**. Start by deciding what specific actions need to be taken to reach your goal. Avoid vague statements like eat less and study more—be clear and precise. Study for at least four hours each night leaves no room for doubt about what you need to do and whether or not you’ve actually done it.

• **Decide when and where to do it**. Next, decide when and where you will take each action. Again, be as specific as possible. This will help your brain to detect and seize the opportunity when it arises, even if your conscious mind is too busy to notice.

• **Formulate your if-then plan**. Put it all together in an if-then statement. If it is a weeknight, I will go to my room and study for at least four hours. You can write these plans down in a notebook, if you prefer, or simply repeat them to yourself a few times to let them really sink in.

• **Target the obstacles**. Think about the obstacles and temptations that are likely to arise while you are pursuing your goal. How will you deal with them? Make an if-then plan for each. (If my friends call to ask me to go out on a weeknight, I’ll say no thanks and see them on the weekend.) This will allow you to make the best possible decisions well in advance, keeping you on track to succeed no matter what comes your way.